

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 080638 TOSEC 030053
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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 080638 TOSEC 030053

EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR TODMAN FROM ARA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BL

SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL POLITICAL BACKGROUND ON BOLIVIA
POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: LA PAZ 2511

1. FOR YOUR REFERENCE, WE HAVE SUMMARIZED BELOW IN
SOME DETAIL OUR VIEWS OF THE STATE OF THE ART IN
BOLIVIAN POLITICS.

2. PEREDA AND HIS CAMPAIGN ADVISERS HAVE TRIED TO
DEVELOP SUPPORT FROM BOTH OF BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES,
THE MNR AND THE FALANGISTAS (FSB). THE FSB INITIALLY
ASKED FOR VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION AND A REPORTED
40 PERCENT OF APPOINTMENTS IN A PEREDA ADMINISTRATION.
WHEN THIS OFFER WAS TURNED DOWN, FSB THEN NOMINATED ITS
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PAGE 02 STATE 080638 TOSEC 030053

OWN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, LONG-TIME LEADER MARIO
GUTIERREZ. FSB MAY YET BE WILLING TO YIELD ITS CANDIDACY
AND SUPPORT PEREDA WITH A LOWER ASKING PRICE. ALSO, ONE
SMALL FACTION OF MNR HAD ALREADY DECLARED SUPPORT OF
PEREDA'S CANDIDACY, BUT THIS FACTION CANNOT DELIVER A
SIGNIFICANT VOTE.

3. THE TWO LARGER MNR FACTIONS ARE GOING THEIR OWN WAYS. MNR LEFTISTS ARE SUPPORTING EX-PRESIDENT HERNAN SILES ZUAZO, WHO APPARENTLY HAS DECLARED FOR THE PRESIDENCY. SILES ZUAZO ADDITIONALLY CAN COUNT ON COMMUNIST, SOCIALIST AND OTHER LEFTIST BACKING. OTHER MNR VOTERS MIGHT WELL FOLLOW LEAD OF EX-PRESIDENT VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH CONTACTS HAVE BEEN MADE BETWEEN PAZ AND OTHER GROUPS (AND WITH GOB), PAZ HAS NOT YET DISCLOSED HIS POSITION. (PAZ IS IN THE US, BUT REPORTEDLY MIGHT RETURN TO BOLIVIA IN APRIL TO TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN THE CAMPAIGN.)

4. BANZER CONFIDANT ALFREDO ARCE (HERE ON LEADER GRANT) TOLD ARA/AND MARCH 27 THAT PEREDA'S CANDIDACY MUST GAIN MAJOR SUPPORT FROM THE CITIES, AND DOES NOT NOW HAVE IT. ARCE CLAIMS THAT A PEREDA VICTORY RIDING SOLELY ON CAMPESINO VOTES WOULD BE A HOLLOW ONE AND WOULD UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMACY AND STRENGTH OF A PEREDA ADMINISTRATION. PEREDA HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING WITH THE FSB AND PROBABLY COULD ULTIMATELY GAIN THEIR SUPPORT. BUT THE FSB WHOSE STRENGTH IS IN THE CITIES AMONG TEACHERS AND OTHER WHITE COLLAR GROUPS, CANNOT DELIVER A HEAVY VOTE. THE MNR IS SPLIT AT LEAST THREE WAYS AND PEREDA DESPERATELY NEEDS SUPPORT, OR AT LEAST ACQUIESCENCE, FROM PAZ ESTENSSORO TO SUPPLEMENT HIS BACKING FROM THE ONE SMALL PRO-GOVERNMENT MNR FACTION WHICH SUPPORTS HIM NOW. THE LEFT UNDER

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 080638 TOSEC 030053

SILES ZUAZO WILL OPPOSE PEREDA ALL THE WAY. FINALLY, A MINOR CANDIDACY WITH CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT SUPPORT HAS BEEN LAUNCHED BY A RETIRED GENERAL (BERNAL) WHICH MIGHT BLEED OFF YET A FEW MORE MODERATE VOTERS -- AND PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANTLY SOME OF THE MILITARY SUPPORT PEREDA MUST COUNT UPON IN HIS INITIAL POWER BASE.

5. WE CONCLUDE THAT THE PEREDA CANDIDACY HAS MISFIRED SO FAR BUT THAT HE COULD NONETHELESS WIN THE PRESIDENCY RELYING ON THE CAMPESINO VOTE AND WHATEVER FSB OR MNR SUPPORT HE CAN OBTAIN BETWEEN NOW AND THE JULY 9 ELECTION DATE. BANZER, AS ARCE CONFIRMS, IS IN A TIGHT PLACE. HE IS CONCERNED BY THE WEAKNESS OF THE PEREDA CANDIDACY AND THE CONSEQUENT PROSPECTS FOR WEAK GOVERNMENT, BUT HE IS ALSO QUITE CONCERNED ABOUT A VIRTUALLY CERTAIN LOSS OF PRESTIGE IF HE STOPS DEMOCRATIZATION AFTER HAVING

EMBARKED BOLDLY ON IT.

6. IN ALL THIS BOLIVIA'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, INCLUDING OF COURSE THE SLIPPING TIN PRICES, ARE NOT ABSENT. THEY POSE INCREASING THREATS TO BANZER AND

THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS. THE LEFT IN BFIDVIA
HAS OF COURSE SEIZED UPON U.S. TIN SALES AS PROOF
OF U.S. INSINCERITY AND WILLINGNESS TO TRIFLE WITH
BOLIVIA'S LIFE BLOOD. SHOULD BANZER, BACKED BY FORCE
OF ARMS, POSTPONE ELECTIONS AND EITHER STAY ON OR
PUT IN A JUNTA, THE BOLIVIAN SITUATION WILL FESTER
AT SOME COST IN VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING.

7. SEPTTEL FOLLOWS ON POLICY ALTERNATIVES. COOPER

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